

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION, GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

REGION: Rocky Mountain      PARK/AREA NAME: Glacier National Park      PARK NUMBER: 1430  
 STRUCTURE NAME: Swiftcurrent Fire Lookout      STRUCTURE NUMBER: 578  
 LOCATION OF STRUCTURE:      QUADRANGLE NAME: Ahern Pass  
     Zone Easting Northing      QUADRANGLE SCALE: 7.5-minute  
 UTM A: 12 296810 5407100

CLASSIFICATION:		NUMBER OF RESOURCES:	
OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:	CATEGORY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
<input type="checkbox"/> Private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building(s)	<u>1</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Public-Local	<input type="checkbox"/> District	<u>    </u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> Site	<u>    </u>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<u>    </u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed/private & public	<input type="checkbox"/> Object	<u>1</u>	
			Buildings Sites Structures Objects TOTAL

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION:

The Swiftcurrent fire lookout is a two-story, 14x14, square plan structure, with 196 sq. ft. on each floor. The first floor is constructed of coursed ashlar stone, gathered locally. The sloping walls toward the second story are of heavy 2x8" timber. The structure has vertical framing with glass panels (2'5"x4'6") between on four sides. The gable roof has heavy timber framing, with a flagstone and mortar roof surface. The structure is in good condition and is unaltered in its original location. This lookout is a standard, wood frame, 14x14-ft. house set on a 10-ft. tower with catwalk. The basic plan, originally designed by the United States Forest Service, was often modified and revised by both Forest and Park Service engineers. The lookout has good integrity of materials, design, and workmanship.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION:

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1936

The total cost of the Swiftcurrent fire lookout was about \$7,500. This fire lookout is one of several similar buildings constructed in Glacier National Park between the late 1920s and the early 1940s to protect park lands from the always critical threat of fire. A planned network of lookouts within the Park and on adjoining national forest lands allowed reciprocal surveillance of both areas. The series of lookouts in Glacier succeeded for many years in curtailing disastrous fires in the park. Today, air observation allows a more comprehensive coverage of the park and has replaced the manned lookout almost entirely.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Swiftcurrent fire lookout is less than 50 years old, yet it served as an important element in the park's fire management plan. Forest fires had proven devastating to park resources throughout the first three decades of Glacier National Park's existence. The construction of this fire lookout provided one of the final links in a system of lookouts that minimized the destruction by fire of the park's scenic qualities. For these reasons, this fire lookout should be considered as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCE:

- <sup>1</sup>"Lookout Stations, 1930-1943," File D-34, 620-37, GNPLA.
- <sup>2</sup>Hillory A. Tolson to Regional Director, Region II, October 27, 1943, "Glacier: Lands, Buildings, Roads and Trails; Lookout Stations," File: 620-037, Part One From July 1929 to November 1945, Glacier National Park, National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Washington, DC.
- <sup>3</sup>Chief Engineer Burney to Regional Director, Region II, November 5, 1945, *ibid*.

FORM PREPARED BY:

DATE: June 1984

NAME/TITLE:

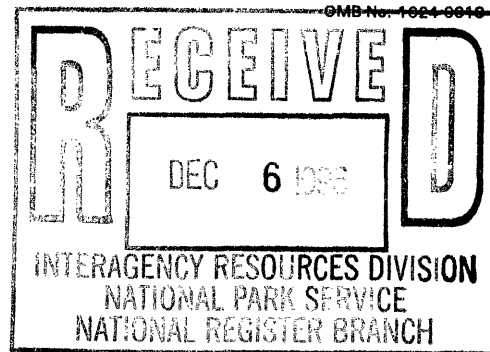
ORGANIZATION: Historical Research Associates, P.O. Box 7086, Missoula, MT 59807-7086

12/2/1985

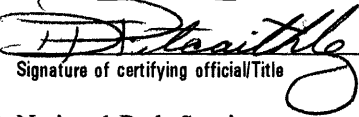
86003694

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Swiftcurrent Lookout (addendum), Flathead County, MT.

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 80. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

12.5.95

National Park Service

State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

  
Signature of commenting or other official

Date

SEP 29 1995

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

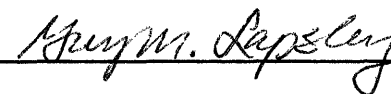
I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

   entered in the National Register   see continuation sheet   determined eligible for the National Register   see continuation sheet   determined not eligible for the National Register   see continuation sheet   removed from the National Register   see continuation sheet☒ other (explain)

Additional Documentation Accepted

  
Guy M. Lapsley

1/19/96

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number                      7                      Page      2                      Swiftcurrent Lookout (addendum), Flathead County, MT.

---

### Building Interior

The Swiftcurrent Lookout is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Additional documentation is provided below for the purpose of describing and evaluating the interior for integrity and significance.

### 7. Narrative Description

#### Summary

Fire lookouts were generally constructed from standardized building packages, packed to the lookout site for assembly. Most were also constructed following the mid-1920s increase in lookout-construction appropriations and prior to the 1930s advent of aerial fire detection and suppression. This use of standard plans and the short construction period resulted in a remarkable degree of uniformity in interior design, not only in park lookouts but also in contemporaneous lookouts built on the forests of the USFS Northern Region. Paneled or vertical-plank doors (like the windows, paired with full-length "storms") provided access. In a classic case of design following function, large multi-light awning windows dominated all four elevations; painted 2" to 4" tongue-and-groove planks covered the small expanse of exposed interior wall. Floors were generally finished with painted 3-inch to 6-inch softwood. Fixed furnishings included the critical and centrally located fire finders, a wood-burning stove, a small cot, a wood table and chair(s), and wall-mounted cupboards located above the window banks, near the ceilings. Ceilings were either open/exposed truss or, if dropped, finished with painted tongue-and-groove planks and containing a hinged door leading to the "attic" storage space. Food and equipment storage areas in the "basement" were unfinished and accessed by vertical-board or paneled wood doors.

#### Swiftcurrent Lookout (#578), 1936

As befits its function, pairs of large two-light windows dominate the interior of this small building. Two-inch floorboards, painted grey and paired with 3" baseboards (painted white), cover the floors. Slightly wider planks (3") (either shiplap or tongue-and-groove) cover the walls and ceiling. An 8" board runs along the junction of the walls and ceiling. These boards extend only a short distance between the baseboard and the window sill or the window sill and the ceiling; symmetrically spaced vertical "battens" create the appearance of wainscotting (see photo 1). A trap door, also constructed of 3" planks, provides access to the attic storage space. Two-inch boards frame all windows and the three-panel/one-light exterior door.

Furnishings include three free-standing cupboard units constructed of 3" planks; 2 chairs; a bedframe; a table; a bookcase; fixtures for propane lights; and the centrally located fire finder. Modern shelves and bins have been constructed above the windows and hold a variety of household goods.

The basement storage area, created by the elevated construction of the primary component and accessed through a vertical plank door, features dirt floors and stone walls. The ceiling is unfinished, exposing the floor upper level floor joist. Open shelves and the floor space are littered with tools, propane tanks, bedframes, and miscellaneous equipment.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number

8, Photographs

Page 3

Swiftcurrent Lookout (addendum),  
Flathead County, MT.

### 8. Statement of Significance

The interior is unmodified and contributes to the building's significance.

### Photographs

- 1) Photographer: Wayne Thompson
- 2) Date of Photographs: August 1993
- 3) Location of Negatives: National Park Service, RMR-RC, Denver, CO.

PHOTO NUMBER	BUILDING NAME AND NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
1	Swiftcurrent Lookout (#578)	Interior-south wall
2	Swiftcurrent Lookout (#578)	Interior-chair and bed